

## **THE MESSAGE OF ISLAM**

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Let me begin by clarifying that for us Islam is not the name of some unique faith presented for the first time by Mohammad (peace be upon him) who should, on that account be called the founder of Islam. The Qur'an makes it abundantly clear that Islam—the complete submission of man before God—is the one and only faith consistently revealed by God to mankind from the very beginning. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Christ—prophets who appeared at different times and places—all propagated the same faith. They were not founders of faiths to be named after them. They were each reiterating the faith of their predecessors.'

#### **II. What distinguishes Mohammad from the other Prophets?**

- (i) He was the last Prophet of God.
- (ii) God revived through him the same genuine faith, which had been conveyed by all the Prophets.
- (iii) This original message was corrupted, and split into various religions by people of different ages, who indulged in interpolations and admixture. God eliminated these alien elements and Islam, in its pure and original form, was transmitted to mankind through Mohammad.
- (iv) Since there was to be no messenger after Mohammad, the Book revealed to him was preserved word for word<sup>2</sup> so that it should be a source of guidance for all times.<sup>3</sup>
- (v) The life of Mohammad, and the manner in which he conducted himself, was also recorded in a unique manner by his companions and by later compilers of the Tradition. A more complete and authentic account of the life, sayings, and actions, of any Prophet or historical personage, has never been compiled.<sup>4</sup>
- (vi) In this way, the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet together became a reliable source of knowing what is Islam, what it stands for, what guidance it provides, and what obligations it places upon us.

III. As Muslims, we believe in all the Prophets who preceded Mohammad— not only those who are mentioned in the Qur'an, but also those who are not so mentioned and this is such an integral part of our faith that if we were to abandon

it we should cease to be Muslims. But for instruction we turn to Prophet Mohammad alone Not on account of any prejudice, but because

- a) As the last of God's Prophets he brought us the latest divine dispensation,
- b) The Word of God which reached us through Mohammad is pure divine language, free of human admixtures, and preserved in its original form Its language is a living language, spoken, written and understood by millions of people, and whose grammar, vocabulary, idiom, pronunciation, and script have remained unchanged from the time of revelation till today
- c) As I have said earlier, we have a complete historical record of the life, character, conduct, sayings, and actions of the Prophet Mohammad, preserved with meticulous care, accuracy and detail since this cannot be said of other prophets we can believe in them but we cannot emulate them

IV. It is our belief that Mohammad's mission was for the world as a whole and for all times, for,

- (i) Its universality has been clearly confirmed by the Qur'an,
- (ii) It is a logical consequence of the finality of his prophet hood. A prophet, after whom there was to be no other, had to be a guide and leader for all men and for all ages,
- (iii) God has provided through him a complete code which man needs to follow the right path, and this in itself, supports the concept of finality, because without completeness the need for other prophets would remain
- (iv) It is a fact that during the last 1400 years no man has arisen whose life and work bears even the slightest resemblance to that of a prophet. Nor has anyone presented a book, which could be remotely considered as divine communication. Still less has there been a man to claim legitimate authority as a lawgiver for mankind.

V. It must, at this point, be understood why the need arose for God to communicate with man through His prophets. This has to be examined in the context of the sources of human knowledge .At the preliminary stage we gain knowledge through empirical observation. At higher levels comes deductive reasoning accompanied by scientific investigation. Man is sufficiently well equipped in these fields not to require direct divine assistance. Though, no doubt, there is an ever present divine will help man in his research and innovative endeavors and

revealing to him progressively the mysteries of His creation. Some gifted individuals achieve, in moments of rare inspiration, new insights or discover new laws of nature. But there is another type of knowledge, which is beyond the reach of our senses or scientific study. This sphere of knowledge does not submit to any instrument of scientific examination. Philosophy and science can only speculate about it. Human theories about ultimate realities, based on reason, never achieve the level of certainty, and their authors, conscious of their limitations do not present them as conclusively proved. In respect of these realities man is dependent on whatever knowledge is communicated to him by God. How is this knowledge conveyed? Not through the operations of some publishing house, where books are printed and handed over to each man, with instructions to read them, and to discover the truth about himself, about the universe, and about the manner in which he should organize his life. To convey this knowledge to mankind, God chooses prophets as His messengers. He reveals the truth to them and they communicate it to the people.

- VI. The work of a prophet is not limited to communication of the knowledge alone. He has to explain, according to what is revealed to him, the relationship between God and man and man and man as it factually is, and, as it actually should be. He has to prescribe a moral code, enunciate the principles of culture and civilization, lay down the mode of worship, establish a frame-work of belief, and define the moral imperatives, which must govern our life. The Prophet determines the rules, which should form the basis of social and cultural relationship, economic, judicial, and political dealing, matters of war and peace, and international affairs. The Prophet does not transmit merely a code of rituals commonly regarded as 'religion'. He brings with him a whole system of thought and action, which is called Al-Deen (a complete way of life) in Islamic terminology.
- VII. The mission of a prophet does not end with the announcement of this way of life to the world at large. He has to guide the people who follow him, explaining to them the implications of the Islamic creed, the moral code, the divine injunctions and commandments, and the form of worship that sustains the whole system. He has to demonstrate, by practice, the faith he preaches, and his life should be a model which people may be able to follow to organize his own lives. He must give training to the individuals and the Muslim society as a whole to prepare them for practical participation in the evolution of Islamic culture and civilization. The believers must grow under his guidance into an organized community engaged in establishing the Islamic system of life so that God's word should prevail upon all other words.

Not all the Prophets completely succeeded in this mission. There were many who failed not because of any personal fault or inadequacy. They did not succeed because of the prejudice and intolerance of the people or because the circumstances were not favorable. But every prophet had the same mission, and it is a fact of history that Mohammad succeeded in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, as it is in the heavens.

- VIII. The audience of the Qur'an and the Prophet Mohammad was the whole of mankind from the very outset, and those who accepted the Word acquired the status of believers without any distinction. At no time was the invitation of the Qur'an addressed to the people of any particular area, race, tribe, colour or language. The Qur'an always calls upon the "progeny of Adam" or "the mankind" to accept Islam. The specific instructions and injunctions are meant for those who have come to believe in Islam, and they are always addressed as "those who believe." That the message of Islam was universal in character is proved by the fact that those who accepted the message acquired equal rights and status as believers, regardless of all differences of origin. The Qur'an says, "The believers are all like brothers". The Prophet said: "those who subscribe to our beliefs, and adopt the Islamic way of life, have the same rights and the same obligations as we have. The Prophet announced, "Listen! You have one God as you have one father (Adam). There is no distinction between an Arab and a non-Arab. There is no preference for the black over the fair, or the fair over the black. There is distinction only in submission to God. The most virtuous among you is the most honourable in the eyes of God".
- IX. Among the fundamentals of Islam, the most important is belief in one God, —not just the conviction that He exists or that He is one—but that He alone is the Creator, Master, Ruler, and Administrator of all that exists. The universe exists because God wills it to exist, it functions because God wills it to function, and God provides the sustenance and the energy, which everything of the universe requires for its existence and growth. All the attributes of Sovereignty reside in God alone, and no one else has a share in them in the slightest degree. He alone possesses all the attributes of Divinity, and no one other than God possesses any of those attributes. He views the whole universe, and all that it contains, in a single instantaneous glance. He has direct knowledge of the universe, and all that is there in the universe. He knows not only its present, but its past and its future as well. This omnipresence and omniscience is an attribute of God alone and of no other. There was no 'before' him and there is no 'after' him. He has been there always and will be there always—eternal and abiding. All else is transient. He alone is eternally living and present. He is no one's progeny and He has no progeny. Whatever exists, besides His self, is His own creation, and no other can identify himself in any manner with the Lord of the universe, or claim to be his son or daughter. He is man's single Deity. To associate anyone in His worship is as great a sin as it is an act of infidelity. He responds to man's prayers and He alone has the power to accept or reject them. Not to ask of him is senseless arrogance, and to turn to others is sheer ignorance. To seek of him and also of others, is to associate equals with him.
- X. The sovereignty of God in Islam is not just a supernatural phenomenon. It covers all aspects of political and legal sovereignty also and in these too no one other than God has any share. In God alone vests the rightful authority to exercise power on this earth, and over those whom God has created in it. No monarch, no royal family, no elite class, no leader of any religious group, no democracy

established on the basis of the sovereignty of the people, can participate in God's sovereignty. Whoever claims such a position is a rebel, as are those who leave God and turn to other people in obedience. Similarly, any institution or individual attempting to assume political and legal sovereignty and restrict the jurisdiction of God to spheres of personal law or religious duties is really a usurper and a rebel. The truth is that no one can claim to be a lawgiver on God's earth, and no one can challenge the supreme authority of God Almighty in any sphere.

XI. Certain natural consequences flow from this Islamic concept of God.

- (a) God alone is the real Deity and no one other than God has any right to be worshipped by man.
- (b) God alone has authority over the forces of the universe, and he alone can fulfill or frustrate man's hopes. Man should turn to Him alone in prayer. He should never imagine that prayers could be addressed to anyone but God.
- (c) God is the Master of man's destiny and no one else can interfere with the fate of others or with his own fate. Man's hopes and fears must, therefore, be directed only to God. No one else should be an object of fear or source of favour.
- (d) God is the Creator of the world and He alone has complete and direct knowledge of the reality of man and of the world. Only He can guide man through the complicated course of life and instruct him regarding good and evil. Since God alone is the Creator and the Master He has exclusive authority over the universe and man. It is an act of blasphemy for man to become independent or claim authority over other men. For man to become his own lawgiver to accept the authority of any other individual or institution as such is equally blasphemous. The ultimate Lawgiver and Master of His creation on this earth is no other than God, and His law has the status of the supreme law. Man can legislate subject to his Supreme law. Beyond that he has no legislative authority.

XII. We now come to our second most important belief---belief in Mohammad's prophet hood. God conveyed His message to man through Mohammad. This took two forms:

- (a) God revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet in his own language.
- (b) The Sunnah of the Prophet, which is an unerring guide to man in respect of all that is permissible and all that is prohibited in the eyes of God. Without this belief in the Prophet, belief in God would become a mere theoretical proposition. It is the example of practical

leadership, and the ideological guidance provided by the Prophet, which transforms belief in God into a culture and a civilization, and enables man to evolve a way of life. We get through the Prophet not only rules of guidance, but a complete scheme of values and a practical code of conduct. No one can be a practicing Muslim unless he believes in the Prophet as he believes in God.

- XIII. The position of the Prophet has been so clearly defined in Islam that we can know what he was and what he was not. The Prophet is no more than a servant of God. He was to make people servants of God and not servants of himself. At least seventeen times a day Muslims recite in their prayers: "I bear witness that Mohammad is a servant of God and is His prophet." The Qur'an leaves no doubt that the Prophet is but a human being and has no share whatever in Divinity. The Prophet is neither superhuman nor is he free of human weaknesses. He owns no treasure of God, nor does he possess knowledge of the unknown that he should become all knowing like God Almighty. Leave alone being able to benefit others or cause them harm, the Prophet cannot do so even in respect of himself. The precise task of the Prophet is to communicate the message of God. He has no powers to make people righteous and faithful. Nor can he call to account those who refuse to believe, and he certainly has no power to punish them for their disbelief. Should the Prophet himself choose to defy God or fabricate things on behalf of God or make any change in the message revealed to him, he will incur divine displeasure and punishment. Mohammad is one of the Prophets of God, and above that he has no status. He cannot by himself prohibit or permit anything. Without a mandate from God he cannot legislate for the people. He has to strictly conform to Divine commandments. Islam ensured that the believers should not turn the Prophet into a demi-god. Some of the earlier prophets suffered this fate at the hands of their followers. They attributed all kinds of supernatural powers to their leaders and made them into God's equals or progeny or incarnation. By discouraging such exaggeration Islam has established the true position of the Prophet as follows:

No one can claim to be a believer without believing in the Prophet. He who obeys the Prophet, in fact, obeys God. God has not designated any Prophet except to be obeyed according to His will. The path of the Prophet is the path of Divine guidance. Whatever the Prophet ordains must be accepted, and whatever he instructs to avoid, must be avoided. The Prophet clarified this when he said: I am a mortal like you. In matters revealed to me by God, you must obey my instructions. But you know more about your own worldly affairs than I do so my advice in these matters is not binding. The Sunnah of Mohammad is, in fact an exposition of the purpose of the Qur'an, and this exposition too was conveyed to the Prophet by God Himself, as the author of the Qur'an. The Prophet's explanation of the Qur'an enjoys divine sanction, and no one else can interpret Qur'an which may be in conflict with or repugnant to the explanation given by the Prophet. God declared the life of Mohammad as a model life. No one can be a true believer unless he accepts the decision of the Prophet. Muslims have not an

independent position in a matter determined by the Prophet. Before deciding any matter Muslims must first ascertain whether God and His Prophet decided any analogous matter earlier, and if a precedent exists they must follow it.

I hope I have clarified that God conveyed, through the Prophet, to mankind not only a supreme law but also a permanent scheme of values. That which is good, according to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, is good for all times, and that which is evil, shall remain evil forever. That which is enjoined as duty, in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, shall always be a duty. What is declared permissible is permissible forever, and what is prohibited is prohibited for all times. In this law no amendment, deletion, addition, or abrogation, is possible unless some person or community decides to renounce Islam. So long as Muslims remain Muslims, it is impossible in their social and legal system that something, which was evil yesterday, turns into good today, and reverts to evil tomorrow

XIV. The third fundamental creed of Islam is belief in the hereafter (Akhirah). Denial of the hereafter is the denial of Islam even though one may have belief in God, in the Prophet, and in the Qur'an. In its detailed form, this belief is composed of the following essential elements:

- (i) Man has not been unleashed on the earth as an irresponsible savage. He is accountable to God for his actions. Today's life is only a test and an examination. At the end we will all be called upon to render a complete account of our acts of commission and omission to God.
- (ii) The time for accountability is fixed by God. The tenure allotted to mankind, on this earth, shall terminate on the doomsday, when the present order will be annihilated and replaced by another. The whole human race will rise once again in the new world.
- (iii) That will be the time when they will appear before God Almighty, and every one will face the consequences of his personal acts in his individual capacity.
- (iv) In the Judgment will rest not on God's own knowledge alone. The requirements of due process of justice will be fully observed. A complete record of the actions of every individual, without the slightest alternation, will be put in the open Court, and evidence, of different categories, will be presented to prove what was done by man in private or in public, and the motives which inspired his conduct.
- (v) There will be no undue intercession. Neither bribery, nor advocacy against the truth will be tolerated. No one will be able to shift his burden to another. Even the closest relations, friends, leaders, religious guides, or self-styled deities, will not be able to offer any help to anyone. Man will stand by himself—helpless and alone and render his

account, and await the pronouncement of the judgment, which shall be in the power of God alone.

- (vi) The judgment will rest on one question Did man conduct himself, in submission to God, in strict conformity with the truth revealed to the Prophets, and with the conviction that he will be held responsible for his conduct in life on the Day of Judgment? If the answer is in the affirmative, the reward will be Paradise, and if in the negative, Hell will be the punishment.

XV. Belief in the hereafter divides people into three distinct categories. First, there are those who do not believe in the hereafter and regard life on this earth as the only life. Naturally, they judge good and evil by the results which manifest themselves in this world. If an action produces beneficial results it is good, and if it brings about harmful results it is evil. Quite often the same action is regarded as good when the results are good, and bad when its results are bad. Second, those people who do not deny the hereafter, but who depend on the intercession or atonement of some one to absolve them of their sins. Among them there are some, who regard themselves as God's chosen people, who will receive only nominal punishment however grave their sins. This deprives them of the moral advantage, which they could have derived from their belief in the hereafter. As a result they also become very much like the people who deny the hereafter. Third, are those people who believe in the hereafter in the form in which Islam presents it. They do not delude themselves that they have any special relationship with God, or that anyone can intercede on their behalf. They know that they alone are responsible for their actions. For them the belief in the hereafter becomes a great moral force. A person who has the conviction that he is fully accountable for all his actions finds a permanent guard, stationed within himself, who cautions him and admonishes him whenever he deviates from the right path. There may be no court to summon him, no policemen to apprehend him, no witnesses to accuse him, and no public opinion to press him, but the guard within him is ever on the alert, ready to seize him whenever he transgresses. The consciousness of this inner presence makes man fear God even when he is all by himself. He discharges his duties honestly, and refrains from doing anything, which is prohibited. Should he succumb to temptation, and violate the law of God, he is ever ready to offer sincere regrets, and to enter into a firm contract with the future that he will not repeat the mistake. There can be neither greater instrument of moral reformation nor any better method to help man to develop a sound and stable character. It is the hereafter, which helps men, under all circumstances, to conform to God's scheme of permanent values. It is for this reason that Islam attaches great importance to the belief in the hereafter, and without it even the belief in God and the Prophet is not sufficient for man's guidance.

XVI. A little earlier, I mentioned that Islam represents a whole civilization, a complete culture, and a comprehensive world order. It provides moral guidance in all walks of life. That is why Islamic values are not for the ascetic who renounces the



world, but for him who actively participates in different spheres of life, and works within them. The moral values which people look for in convents, monasteries, and cloisters, are presented by Islam right in the current of life. Heads of governments, governors of states, judges, members of the armed forces and police services, elected representatives of the people in the parliaments, leaders of finance, trade and industry, college and university teachers, and students alike receive guidance to organize their lives according to the principles of Islam. There is no distinction in Islam between private and public conduct. The same moral code, which one observes at home, applies to one's conduct in public. Every institution of society and every department of Government must conform to the laws of Islam. Politics must be based on truth and justice. Nations should deal with one another, on the basis of mutual recognition of rights, and due discharge of obligations. Even if there has to be war, those engaged in it should conduct themselves not as barbarians but as civilized human beings. When man decides to submit to the will of God, and accepts His law as the supreme law, and organizes his life in accordance with the revealed moral code, on the principle of accountability to God, the quality and character of his life cannot be limited to the precincts of prayer halls. It must extend itself to every sphere of his work as a man of God.

This briefly is what Islam stands for. This is no dream or Utopia. The Prophet of Islam, and his companions, developed and established a complete model of Islam on this earth for mankind to follow.

### **Translation of the few Verses from The Holy Qur'an**

This is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the god fearing who believe in the Unseen, and perform the prayer, and spend of that We have provided them; who believe in what has been sent down to these [Mohammed] and what has been sent down before thee, and have faith in the Hereafter; those are upon guidance from their Lord, those are the ones who prosper. (Surah II, 1-4)

Say you: "We believe in God, and in that which has been sent down on us and sent down on Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophet, of their Lord; we make no division between any of them, and to I inn we surrender." (Sura II, 130)

It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and lo the West. True piety is this; to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets; to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars and to ransom the slave; to perform the prayer; to pay the alms. And they who fulfil their covenant.... and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship, and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly god fearing. (Sura 11, 172, 173)

Surely this Qur'an guides to the way that is the straightest and gives good tidings to the believers who do deeds of righteousness.... Thy Lord has decreed you shall not worship

squander.... And keep not thy hand chained to thy neck, nor outspread it widespread altogether, or thou wilt sit reproached and denuded.... And approach not fornication; surely it is a shameful, and evil as a way. And slay not the soul God has forbidden.... And fill up the measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance.... And walk not in the earth exultantly; certainly thou wilt never tear the earth open, nor attain the mountains in height. (Surah XVII, 9, 23-37)